

The role of citizens, communities and civil society in Ukraine's recovery

The recovery challenge

Ukraine's resilience and capacity to repel Russian aggression are, to a large degree, underpinned by an active independent volunteer movement and a network of civil society organizations (CSOs). Since the full-scale invasion in 2022, the non-profit sector has adapted quickly to meet the enormous challenges of the war. Many groups are already helping war-affected communities by redirecting donor funds and mobilizing local resources. This energy and ambition must be channelled into efforts to rebuild the country.

The majority of CSOs responding to a Chatham House survey stated that engagement of the sector in the recovery effort is limited, mainly due to a lack of political will at the central government level. The framework of inclusion, consultations and civic participation is yet to be shaped, but Ukraine does not have to start from scratch. If properly undertaken, the engagement of citizens, communities and civil society will strengthen Ukraine's social capital, with positive impacts for national and local governance, social trust, public health and well-being. It will also enhance the quality of recovery and help consolidate democracy.

Policy recommendations

To modernize and transform the country post-war, Ukraine and its partners must:

- 1. Recognize civil society as a contributor and an integral part of the overall recovery system, not just a beneficiary.** Following three decades of hard-fought battles for Ukrainian democracy, civil society is well positioned to add value to efforts to rebuild Ukraine. Institutional donors can help by soliciting Ukrainian expertise outside of the government when designing specific funding mechanisms for civil society. In view of Ukraine's EU candidate status, they should consider adopting the EU's code of conduct on partnership principles, which describes and mandates how local authorities and government should engage stakeholders in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of public investment and regional cohesion programmes.
- 2. Embed resilience throughout recovery projects.** Ukraine's institutions – at both state and regional level – must be modernized to enable them to learn, diversify, adapt and self-regulate. Civil society representatives can contribute valuable networks, knowledge, human capital and vision, helping to ensure a plurality of views and that all communities have the resources they need to withstand future shocks.
- 3. Encourage Ukraine's government and CSOs to work together on a civil society engagement framework.** All assistance directed to the recovery should be accompanied by conditions requiring citizen engagement. This

applies at all levels of government, including the operations of the newly established State Agency for Recovery and Infrastructural Development, Multi-Donor Coordination Platform, National Recovery Council and advisory groups at individual ministries.

- 4. Establish an independent cross-sectoral recovery facilitation unit.** Such a body would bring together key stakeholders (government, major donors, business and civil society) to support and strengthen the quality of the recovery inside Ukraine through knowledge- and data-sharing, strategic communications and capacity-building. Connecting and pooling global expertise in this way could potentially have wider benefits aside from rebuilding Ukraine, as lessons learned may give rise to innovative and effective solutions that can be replicated elsewhere.
- 5. Ensure that recovery is community-driven.** Donors should invest in institutional regeneration – particularly in de-occupied areas – to ensure that local self-governance and public institutions have adequate operational capacity in terms of people and skills. They should also support Ukrainian municipalities to take the lead where they are best positioned to act. 92 per cent of regional CSOs favour engagement in designing community plans and many are eager to deliver social services. Positive experiences of participatory budgeting would ensure citizens have a say in shaping recovery priorities.
- 6. Give civil society a powerful role in safeguarding the integrity of the recovery process.** Dedicated funding should be earmarked for civic monitoring, investigative journalism and digital solutions aimed at increasing transparency. To reinforce accountability, Ukraine's partners should invest in projects that promote collective action – from the grassroots up – for community-led oversight of public procurement, private sector involvement in recovery work, and the quality and sustainability of project delivery. While digital tools like Digital Ecosystem for Reconstruction Management (DREAM) can help tackle transparency challenges, the effectiveness of such tools will ultimately depend on the capacity of actors across Ukrainian society to use them and the public demand for accountability.
- 7. Support large-scale, intensive training to build skills for the recovery.** Donors should finance professional development programmes for representatives of government, civil society, business and media. These cross-sectoral programmes can offer fast-track, practical modules in areas including: strategic recovery planning; project management; public finance; citizen engagement; dispute mediation; integrity; working with new digital systems to track recovery; and delivery of services to groups such as veterans, internally displaced persons and children.



More resources

Lutsevych, O. (2023), *Giving civil society a stake in Ukraine's recovery: How government, citizens and donors can work together to embed trust in reconstruction*, Chatham House Briefing, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/06/giving-civil-society-stake-ukraines-recovery>.



Rudolph, J. and Eisen, N. (2023), 'Donors Should Get Businesses to Invest in Ukraine by Committing to Muscular Reform Coordination', blog post, GMF Alliance for Securing Democracy, 22 May 2023, <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/donors-ukraine-investment>.